

# The Question of the Spatial Identification of the Brno and Jihlava Franciscans in the Late Middle Ages in Connection with the Poorer Social Strata Based on the Study of Taxation Records

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**Abstract:** It has sometimes been argued that a quite frequent location of Franciscan friaries close to town walls and/or town gates was due to their close proximity to the poor living there. The present article explores the correlation between the location of two Moravian Franciscan friaries situated in these areas and their spatial identification with the poorer strata around their friaries during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This will be considered in the light of research on social topography carried out for the late medieval Swiss towns. Thanks to their well preserved taxation records the towns of Brno and Jihlava will be examined. For Brno *rejstříky městské sbírky* (registers of the town's collection) and *berní knihy* (taxation books) will be studied, with a particular focus on the period between the years 1345 and 1365. For Jihlava *rejstříky městské sbírky* only survived, the most complete of them from between 1425 to 1442 will be analyzed.

**Key words:** Franciscan friaries, poorer strata, taxation records, social topography, Brno, Jihlava

**Rezumat:** Despre identificarea spațială a franciscanilor din Brno și Jihlava în Evul Mediu târziu. Analiza legăturii franciscanilor cu straturile sociale sărace în lumina registrelor de impozite A fost deseori invocat în cercetarea referitoare la topografia ordinelor mendicante faptul că franciscanii au preferat să-și construiască conventurile în apropierea zidurilor orașelor și/sau a porților de intrare în orașe datorită proximității săracilor care locuiau în aceste zone urbane. Prezentul articol își propune să investigheze conexiunea existentă între localizarea a două conventuri franciscane din Moravia în ariile locuite de săraci și identificarea lor spațială cu straturile sărace ale orașenimii din apropierea conventurilor lor în intervalul cronologic cuprins între secolele XIV și XV. Acest aspect va fi analizat

din perspectiva cercetărilor asupra topografiei sociale care a caracterizat orașele elvețiene în Evul Mediu târziu. Supraviețuirea registrelor de impozite ale orașelor Brno și Jihlava permite o atare analiză asupra conventurilor franciscane și a legăturilor lor cu populația săracă a acestor două orașe. Pentru Brno vor fi analizate *rejstříky městské sbírky* (registrele din colecțiile orașului) și *běrní knihy* (registrele de impozite), insistând asupra perioadei cuprinse între anii 1345-1365. Datorită faptului că pentru Jihlava nu au supraviețuit decât *rejstříky městské sbírky*, analiza acestei categorii de surse se va concentra asupra perioadei 1425-1442.

**Cuvinte cheie:** conventuri franciscane, categorii sociale sărace, registre de impozite, topografie socială, Brno, Jihlava

The present article explores the correlation between the location of the Franciscans and their spatial identification with the poorer people around their friaries during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in two Moravian towns. The location of the Brno and Jihlava Franciscan houses will be considered in order to determine the extent to which these friaries were situated close to where the poorer strata in the respective towns resided. This investigation will be carried out in light of the research methodologies on social topography previously used for late medieval Swiss towns.

The question of the placement of the mendicant friaries among the poorer strata of urban society has already been given scholarly attention. Some of the relevant scholars maintain a general, shared opinion when explaining the placement of the mendicant friaries in close proximity to the poor. Thus Vlček, Sommer and Foltýn argue that it was usual to find mendicant orders in the quarters of the poor.<sup>1</sup> Some, like Hoffmann, see the location of Mendicant friaries among the poorer strata to be rooted generally in the original ideals specifically promoted by the Dominicans and the Franciscans, such as charity.<sup>2</sup>

Gilomen's study, on the other hand, sees contrasting results. The author's analysis draws on the specific findings about social topography carried out in late medieval Swiss towns, and includes a physical

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<sup>1</sup> Pavel Vlček - Petr Sommer - Dušan Foltýn, *Encyklopedie českých klášterů* [The encyclopedia of the Bohemian monasteries] (Prague: Libri, 1998), p. 515. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> František Hoffmann, *České město ve středověku* [A Bohemian town in the Middle Ages] (Prague: Panorama, 1992), p. 318.

identification of the location of the poor in connection with the Mendicant friaries.<sup>3</sup> The period Gilomen focuses on overlaps with that of the present article, so his study applies well to the research on the Moravian Franciscan friaries of Brno and Jihlava. His analysis can be compared and contrasted with the situation in Brno and Jihlava, especially in connection with Gilomen's argument that the poor and the rich were intermixed within urban settlements.<sup>4</sup>

The choice of the towns of Brno and Jihlava for a study of social topography is primarily motivated by the well-preserved taxation records for both towns. Before examining the poorer strata in both Brno and Jihlava, however, it is indispensable to mention the limitations that a study of the available records entails. It has to be borne in mind that the examined sources were compiled in order to keep a record of taxpayers in the respective towns and not to record discrepancies in their social status, despite such implications being inherent in tax-related documents. This is significant in that it brings about the question of the extent to which the taxpayers in the records could be called poor. Within the context of all the different groups of the Brno and Jihlava taxpayers examined, it may be, on the one hand, correct to call them poor, especially if they are contrasted with the affluent citizens of these towns. On the other hand, this would create an inaccurate picture because the studied records leave out different groups which could also be counted among the poor but do not appear in the documents. Beggars are an example of a group which was completely exempt from the records, which meant that their numbers were beyond any record. In the case of beggars in particular, it cannot be doubted that their numbers were not insignificant due to their indisputable presence in medieval towns.<sup>5</sup>

The definition of poverty adopted in this study is therefore based on the financial standing of the taxpayers from the Brno and Jihlava taxation records. Also, the term "poor taxpayers" is avoided and the more balanced term of "poorer taxpayers" is used when referring to this stratum because of both the economic definition of the taxpayers'

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Jörg Gilomen, 'Stadtmauern und Bettelorden', in Brigitt Sigel (ed), *Stadt- und Landmauern*, vol. 1: Beiträge zum Stand der Forschung (Zürich: Vdf Hochschulverlag AG an der ETH Zürich, 1995), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Gilomen, 'Stadtmauern', p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> František Hoffmann, *Středověké město v Čechách a na Moravě* [A medieval town in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2010), p. 330.

poverty and the limitations of the taxation records regarding the other poorer groups.

In the fourteenth century, Brno was one of the most populous towns in the Czech Lands with a population of 8000.<sup>6</sup> The study of the Brno poorer strata will be based on *rejstříky městské sbírky* (registers of the town's collection). The Brno registers were compiled on an annual basis.<sup>7</sup> They specified the amount that taxpayers had to pay.<sup>8</sup> Attention will be given to the registers of the town's collection from the years 1345, 1346, 1347, 1348, 1350 and 1365. An almost year by year study of the taxation records has been undertaken not simply because the registers' completeness makes this possible. An equally important reason behind the examination of the poorer taxpayers over several consecutive years is meant to show that the mention of certain levels of taxation in a given year is not coincidental. Recurrent patterns in the records serve to strengthen the argument regarding specific taxpayers' lower financial standing.

To understand the language of the records, a basic grasp of the essential terms used in them is necessary. These include the expressions *tenetur*, *dedit* and *solvit*. The first signifies the amount one had to pay, the second how much one actually paid and the third means that the prescribed amount was fully paid.<sup>9</sup> Sums were calculated using different metric units. There was a *marca* (Czech *hřívna*) that comprised sixty four *grossi* (Czech *groše*), which was further divided into smaller units, of which a fourth was called *ferto* and a sixteenth *lot*.<sup>10</sup>

In the registers, with the exception of the year 1346, the poorer house owners were introduced by the term *item*, which distinguishes them from the tenants of a given house called *ibidem*.<sup>11</sup> The poorer house owners were often given a collective name of *pauperes* or *alii residentes*. Their houses could most frequently be found in the areas close to the town walls. The topographical situating of these houses could be

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<sup>6</sup> Hoffmann, *České město*, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> Bedřich Mendl (ed), *Knihy počtů města Brna z let 1343–1365* [The Brno books of accounts from the years 1343–1365], (Brno: Československý státní ústav historický, 1935), Introduction, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, Introduction, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, Introduction, pp. 55–56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55. In the registers the name of all the poorer house owners is abbreviated to it.

identified within the different town quarters thanks to an existing map of Brno's plots (fig. 1). In *quartale Letorum*, the poorer house owners lived in *platea Seratorum* and in *platea Monialium*. They appeared in the years 1346, 1347, 1348 and 1350.<sup>12</sup> In the next town quarter, *quartale Cursorum*, they were located in particular in the areas known as *forum Equorum* and *Ramhof*. They were found there in 1345, 1346, 1348 and 1350.<sup>13</sup> In the last town quarter, *quartale Mensense*, where there was also a Franciscan friary (*Fratres Minores*), the poorer were found in *platea Bohemorum*. They were mentioned in the registers from the years 1345, 1346, 1347, 1348 and 1350.<sup>14</sup>

The collective name of the poorer house owners disappears from the registers after 1350. Nevertheless, the gap between the year 1350 and the next examined register from 1365 can be bridged. This is because the 1365 register is exceptionally detailed about the property of the taxpayers due to its being in combination with *berní kniha* (taxation book), in which estimations of property can be found.<sup>15</sup> Take, for instance, *mobilia* (movable property). This was recorded even if it amounted to small amounts, while those taxpayers on whom the register was silent in this regard did not even have any small property.<sup>16</sup> Also, the 1365 register includes the plot (*area*) evaluations of the house owners. Even though it is not easy to assess the discrepancies in the quality of the houses located on similarly evaluated plots, the value of the plots can still be considered an important indicator of the relative poverty of households.

This is because there were considerable discrepancies in the plot evaluations and it did matter whether a particular house was close to the market or whether it was located along the town walls where the evaluation of the plots was generally lower.<sup>17</sup>

The houses of the poorer house owners in 1365 are considered to be those whose plot and craft only were taxed without having any other property listed in the register and/or those about whom the only known piece of information is that their plot was evaluated. In the case of those paying *de opere* (a craft tax), it is known that this amounted to eight *grossi*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 54, 66, 95, 97, 174.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 23, 56-57, 114-115, 176.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 24, 58, 69, 123, 177.

<sup>15</sup> Jaroslav Dřimal, 'Sociální složení a majetek obyvatel Brna v letech 1365 až 1509' [A social composition and the property of the Brno citizens in the years 1365 to 1509], *Brno v minulosti a dnes*, 6 (1964): 191.

<sup>16</sup> Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, Introduction, p. 142.

<sup>17</sup> Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, Introduction, p. 128.

in 1365.<sup>18</sup> The remaining sum resulting from the plot evaluation can then be calculated since one *marca* of immovable property was taxed at two *grossi* in 1365.<sup>19</sup> Few households belonging to this group could be found in *platea Seratorum* where the residents' plots were evaluated at two *marcae* at the most.<sup>20</sup> In *forum Equorum* both of the previously defined groups of the poorer house owners lived. Here it can be observed that the lowest evaluation of some of their houses did not exceed half a *marca*.<sup>21</sup> The poorer taxpayers were further found in *platea Bohemorum* in the last town quarter where their plots were evaluated at half a *marca*.<sup>22</sup> This was the lowest plot evaluation found in the 1365 register.

Attempting an analysis of another group of the poorer in Brno - the poorer tenants - is, however, complicated. These were the tenants who paid *de opere* only and had no other property mentioned in the records. While they may be included among the poorer, it is impossible to study their presence for a longer period of time. More details on them can be obtained from the minute registers from the year 1348 and particularly from 1365, but a lack of details about the sums they paid from within this period does not allow one to examine whether these people paid the same tax.

Regardless of these limitations behind studying the poorer tenants, a brief survey of a topographical distribution of them, particularly around the Franciscan friary, can still be done thanks to the exceptionally well-preserved 1365 register. Despite finding that the poorer tenants were situated around the Brno Franciscans, they lived in the houses of quite affluent citizens. A clear indication of their wealth in 1365 is *hereditates* (the total sum of their property).<sup>23</sup> Around the Franciscan friary a few of these tenants were found living in the houses close to *portula civitatis* and from there up to *porta Menesensis* and *platea Menesensis*.<sup>24</sup> Thus, two poorer tenants in the first of these locations, both of whom paid a craft tax in part only, were living in the house whose

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 305.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp. 330-331.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 350.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>24</sup> All these locations for the year 1365 are based on Mendl's observations about the topography of Brno in 1365. See Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, Introduction, pp. 117-119.

owner's property was assessed at eight and a half *marcae*.<sup>25</sup> Heading toward *porta Menesensis*, there was the house where one tenant paid the craft tax in full, another paid nothing of it, and the last paid part of it, while the owner's total property was forty-eight *marcae*.<sup>26</sup> In *platea Menesensis* there were several tenants living in the houses of quite wealthy citizens, with their wealth ranging from ten to forty-six and a half *marcae*.<sup>27</sup>

The poorer Brno taxpayers examined comprised the two groups. One of them was the stratum of the poorer house owners. Though being also located in *platea Bohemorum*, and thus not far from the Brno Franciscans, it is evident that this was not the area where their concentration was the greatest, with poorer house owners being found in other town quarters as well. The second group of the poorer taxpayers identified in Brno were the tenants paying only a craft tax. They could not be studied in greater detail over a longer period owing to a lack of detailed registers between the years 1348 and 1365. Irrespective of these limitations, it was shown, based on the minute register from 1365, that they were found living in the houses of wealthier citizens. Therefore a correlation between a topographical situating of the Franciscan friary and the houses of the poorer does not seem to be particularly strong in Brno.

When it comes to the examination of Jihlava, it is worth noting that this town's population was affected considerably by the Hussite Revolution. Its population supposedly dropped sharply in the course of the conflict, plummeting to around 2500 people after the Hussite Wars, which was in a stark contrast to the estimated 4600 in 1425.<sup>28</sup> The examination of the Jihlava taxation records is based on the oldest ones from between the years 1425 and 1442.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, their study cannot be as detailed as in Brno because the taxation records known as *knihy lozuňk* are completely missing for those years; these were the records listing the property of the taxpayers, so it would have been possible to know about what was taxed.<sup>30</sup> The Brno register from 1365

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<sup>25</sup> Mendl, *Knihy počtů*, 346.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 347.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 348.

<sup>28</sup> Hoffmann, *České město*, p. 216.

<sup>29</sup> František Hoffmann (ed), *Rejstříky městské sbírky jihlavské z let 1425–1442* [The registers of Jihlava's town collection from the years 1425–1442], vol. 1: Předmluva. Úvody. Text., (Prague–Jihlava: Archiv Akademie věd České republiky, 2004), p. xiii.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxiv.

combines such information. On the other hand, there is virtually no gap in the continuity of the Jihlava taxation records from 1425 up to 1431. Thus, the financial standing of the poorer taxpayers can be studied from year to year.

In this study of Jihlava's poorer strata, attention will be given to an examination of *lozuňka*, understood as the tax collection.<sup>31</sup> The town's collection in Jihlava usually took place twice a year, in spring and autumn, while the rate of each *lozuňka* changed throughout the studied period, so it could be doubled, raised by a half, or kept at the same level.<sup>32</sup> In the registers, the basic metric unit used was *groš*, of which sixty (in Czech *kopa*), seven *denarii* or fourteen *halenses* each made up a single *groš*.<sup>33</sup> The term *edit* preceded every sum, but in the critical edition cited it is limited to unclear cases only.<sup>34</sup> The metric units in which the given sums are listed are always indicated at the beginning of each register.

As in Brno, Jihlava's poorer strata in this study also comprise the poorer house owners and the tenants.<sup>35</sup> Hoffmann defines the Jihlava urban poor as those paying the maximum tax of two *grossi* in one town's collection.<sup>36</sup> Paying this maximum amount in the case of the former was associated with a low standard of housing, while the latter paid this from either their crafts or a very small amount of movable property.<sup>37</sup> Their financial standing sometimes found corresponding expressions, of which the word *pauper* is an example.<sup>38</sup> Like in Brno, both groups of the poorer can be located thanks to a detailed town map of the fifteenth century Jihlava (fig. 2).<sup>39</sup> From the taxation records it can be observed that one of the highest concentrations of the poorer house owners was in *platea Monialium*, not far from *klášter sv. Kříže* (the Jihlava Dominicans).

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<sup>31</sup> Hoffmann, *Rejstříky*, p. xxxii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. xliv.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Both can be discerned in the records because the expression for the latter known already from the Brno taxation records as *ibidem* is used, but is shortened here to its first two characters.

<sup>36</sup> František Hoffmann, *Jihlava v husitské revoluci* [Jihlava in the Hussite Revolution] (Havlíčkův Brod: Krajské nakladatelství Havlíčkův Brod, 1961) p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> Hoffmann, *Rejstříky*, p. xli. Some other expressions used in connection with the poorer taxpayers are mentioned in Hoffmann, *Rejstříky*, p. 148.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.



The previously mentioned maximum tax of two *grossi* was paid from 1425 up to 1431 by almost half of the residing taxpayers in this street.<sup>40</sup> Some of the poorer taxpayers were also found in, for instance, *platea Textorum* in the third town quarter. During the years 1425 and 1430/1 poorer house owners there lived in houses twenty-one, twenty-seven and thirty.<sup>41</sup> My listing of the poorer house owners could continue elsewhere, but this would only mean counting a few houses of the poorer scattered here and there in different parts of the town. This includes the area around the Franciscan friary, which was close to *brána Matky boží* (the gate of the Virgin Mary). Unlike the poorer Brno house owners, the collective name of this stratum such as *pauperes* or *alii residentes* is missing in the Jihlava records, so it seems that the greatest concentration of the poorer house owners in one place during the period was in *platea Monialium*.

Though there remains the possibility of doing a continual study on the poorer tenants in Jihlava, at this point of the research their presence around the Jihlava Franciscans seems to have been very scanty. From 1425 to 1428 in the third town quarter there is, for example, one tenant paying two *grossi* in house eighty-four.<sup>42</sup> Finding some other poorer tenants in this area is possible, but they are often recorded for two years at the most. For instance, this was the case with one tenant from the house eighty-five in the third town quarter, and afterwards one tenant from the houses seven and nine in the fourth town quarter.<sup>43</sup> The problem here is that this period is too short to determine with a greater certainty whether they remained in the town while merely ceasing to be mentioned in the records.<sup>44</sup> An equally important observation for the poverty argument is that, like in Brno, there were quite affluent house owners living around the Jihlava Franciscans. They are continually listed in the records, some of whom remained mentioned for the entire examined period. The amount they paid was well beyond the limit of the urban poor defined by Hoffmann. Among them were houses sixty-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp. 19, 71–72, 118–119, 163–164, 204–205, 244–245, 284–285, 328, 369, 412–413, 456–457, 499–500, 538.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp. 28, 80–81, 127–128, 172–173, 212–213, 252–253, 293, 336–337, 378, 421, 464, 507, 546.

<sup>42</sup> Hoffmann, *Rejstříky*, pp. 32, 84, 131, 176, 216, 256, 297, 340.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 32–33, 84–85, 131–132, 176.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. xli.

nine, seventy-one, eighty-six in the third town quarter.<sup>45</sup> In the fourth town quarter these were houses one, four, six and eight.<sup>46</sup>

For Jihlava the study of the poorer taxpayers was less detailed compared to Brno. However, this was compensated by the unrestrained continuity of most of the records. The poorer house owners could most frequently be found in *platea Monialium*, and not around the site of the Franciscans. Also, the poorer tenants found around the Jihlava Franciscans were few in number. Very much like around the Brno Franciscans, the study of the Jihlava poorer tenants revealed that it was also the area where the poorer lived close to the richer people. Thus, the spatial identification of the poorer around the Jihlava Franciscans does not seem to be very strong here either.

Despite arguments for the motivation to situate Franciscan friaries in close proximity to the poor, the findings from both Brno and Jihlava conflict with this viewpoint. With regard to Gilomen's research on social topography carried out on late medieval Swiss towns, the analysis of these two case studies of Brno and Jihlava proved to be quite in agreement with his findings. Even though the poorer groups could be found close to the Franciscan friaries in both towns, a clear spatial identification of the Brno and Jihlava Franciscans with the poorer was undermined by the trend of the poorer and the richer living side by side each other.

The research on the social topography of Brno and Jihlava was done within the context of considerable limitations due to the exemption of other groups of the poorer strata from the registers of the town's collection. Considering the limitations that these registers pose to the study of the urban poor in contrast to the findings which they reveal about the wealthier people living close to the friaries, further research could yield important results when examining the latter social stratum rather than the former. Not only can analysis be much fuller due to the richer townspeople's better financial standing in the taxation records, but their presence around the mendicant friaries demonstrated in this study may lead to research the extent to which they were important in relation to the situating of the Brno and Jihlava Franciscans.

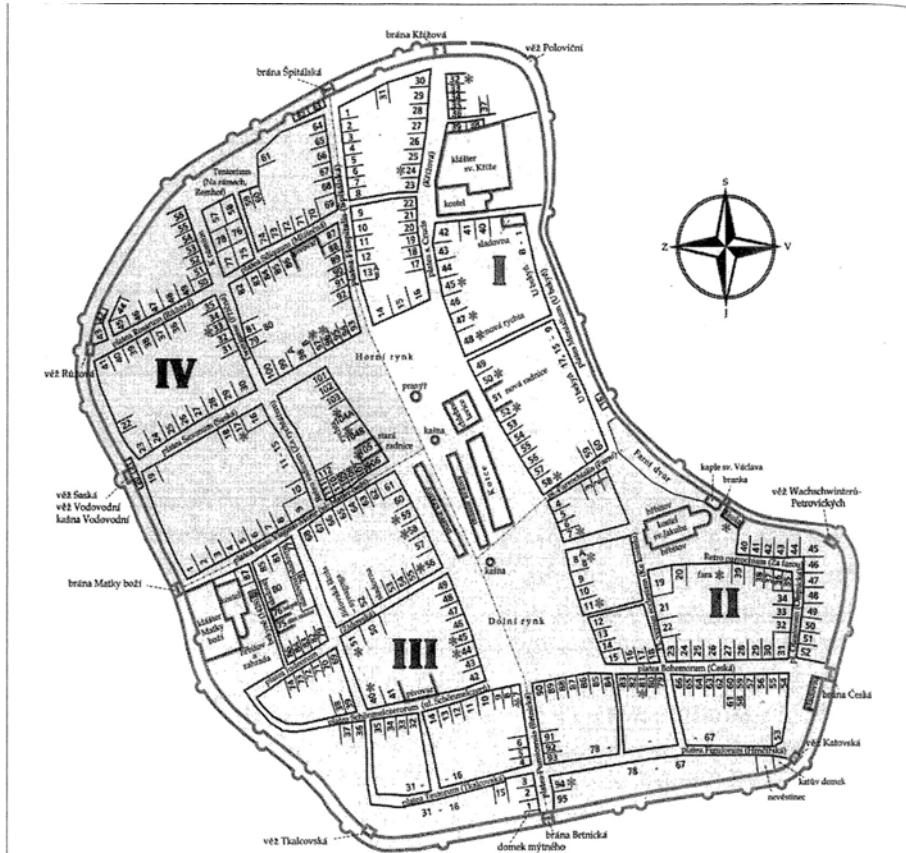
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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. pp. 31-32, 83-84, 131, 175-176, 215-216, 255-256, 296-297, 339-340, 381-382, 424-425, 466-467, 509-510, 548-549, 589, 631-632.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pp. 33, 85, 132, 176-177, 217, 256-257, 297-298, 340-341, 382-383, 425, 468, 510-511, 550, 590, 632.



Fig. 1: The Brno's plots in 1348. Reproduced by permission from Oldřich Vičar, "Místopis Brna v první polovici 14. století. (Prostor uvnitř městských hradeb)" [Topography of Brno in the first half of the fourteenth century. (The space inside the town walls)], *Brno v minulosti a dnes* 7 (1965).



*Fig. 2: Jihlava's plots in the first half of the fifteenth century. Reproduced by permission from František Hoffmann, *Středověké město v Čechách a na Moravě* [A medieval town in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2010), 322.*